United Nations A/C.5/54/21

General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 October 1999

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Fifth Committee
Agenda items 121 and 164

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001

Human resources management

Personnel practices and policies

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The present note is prepared pursuant to the request made by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in paragraph 104 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.[1]

2. The Advisory Committee, in chapter I of its report, made a number of general observations on the specific roles of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General in the area of personnel management. The Committee noted that, in carrying forward the human resources management reform effort, the Secretary-General was frequently assisted by decisions of the General Assembly. In certain cases, however, problems encountered in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions have affected the Secretary-General's efforts to move forward with his human resources management strategy.

3. In paragraph 104 of its report, the Advisory Committee requested the Secretary-General to prepare an analysis of the situation for the consideration of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

4. The Secretary-General wishes to express his appreciation to the Advisory Committee for addressing this issue. He would agree with paragraph 105 of the Committee's report, in which the Committee stresses that the Secretariat's role is to develop the necessary processes and the administrative mechanisms to implement legislative mandates and directives, and that the Secretary-General needs the flexibility to make the administrative arrangements that he deems appropriate, within the context of the overall principles and policies legislated by the General Assembly and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. He is also in agreement with the Advisory Committee's view, set out in paragraph 103, that the Secretariat, in developing implementation proposals, should carefully consider the implications on the work of the Organization of all of the relevant aspects of directives given by the General Assembly, draw the attention of the Assembly to any implementation problems that may arise, and make concrete proposals to deal with those problems.

5. In his statement before the Fifth Committee on 5 October 1999, the Secretary-General addressed concerns with respect to the roles of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, as Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization. He noted that some of the over-administration stemmed from a plethora of resolutions and responsibilities handed down by the Member States over the years, layer upon layer, and he emphasized that the United Nations needed to become a more result-based Organization. In that regard, the numerous resolutions directly impacting on

99-30099 (E) 221099

human resources management are reflective of this tendency to build multiple, complex and often conflicting policies.

6. This approach guided the Secretary-General in the preparation of a conference room paper, submitted to the Fifth Committee at the fifty-second session of the Assembly (A/C.5/52/CRP.2) with a view to drawing attention to certain problems which had arisen with respect to the implementation of resolution 51/226 of 3 April 1997. In addition to drawing attention to specific implementation issues which the Secretariat considered required further review by the Assembly, the following general observations were made:

> "42. It may be useful to view the problems that have arisen and continue to arise in connection with resolution 51/226 in a wider context. The resolution contains dozens of detailed provisions which, as was the case for paragraphs 26 and 27, were 'negotiated' texts aiming at governing conditions of service. The Secretary-General is obliged to implement those provisions, irrespective of the ensuing difficulties. The Secretariat usually has limited time to review draft resolutions before their adoption and such a brief review, usually by only a small number of officials, cannot reveal all the problems that will inevitably arise in the implementation of a great number of detailed provisions. The nature and extent of the problems only become apparent when the text is the object of an in-depth analysis of the manner in which it relates to other rules and practices, and is reviewed by all appropriate officials who are aware of the myriad circumstances to which the new rules must apply.
>
> "43. In order to avoid recurrence of a number of the problems encountered in the implementation of its resolution 51/226, the General Assembly may wish in the future to set 'the broad principles of personnel policy for the staffing and administration of the Secretariat', as envisaged by the scope and purpose provision of the Staff Regulations of the United Nations, and request the Secretary-General to develop specific implementation proposals. Those proposals would be considered and acted upon by the Assembly (see staff regulations 12.2 to 12.3). In developing those proposals, the Secretariat would be able to carefully consider the implications on the work of the Organization of all of the relevant aspects of directives given by the General Assembly, draw the attention of the Assembly to any implementation problems that may arise, and make concrete proposals to deal with those problems."

7. In submitting his comprehensive report on human resources management reform to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, (A/53/342), the Secretary-General presented the overall vision behind, and strategic direction of, the human resources management reform effort and indicated the objectives, current status and future implementation proposals in each of its five major areas.

8. The Secretariat would require more experience with implementation of the most recent resolution in human resources management, namely, resolution 53/221 of 7 April 1999, before presenting an analysis. With respect to the major problems identified by the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat is currently working on simplification of the complex personnel regulations, development of a new recruitment and placement procedure to replace the current cumbersome and time-consuming process and mechanisms to expedite the mobility of staff. In this regard, certain implementation issues can already be noted:

(a) The need for more flexibility for the Secretary-General in conducting P-3 examinations, which may impede career development possibilities for staff at the P-2 level;

(b) The inconsistency between the requests to make existing recruitment procedures more timely and the request to double the time for circulation of vacancy announcements;

(c) The lack of flexibility given to the Secretary-General in assigning staff (sect. II, para. 5, of resolution 51/226 links his discretionary power of appointment and promotion to his Executive Office and the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General level) hinders the development of managed reassignment systems for junior staff;

(d) The inclusion of equitable geographic distribution as a factor in the G to P examinations. The Secretary-General has submitted a document to the Assembly on this matter, pursuant to the request of a number of delegations at the time of the adoption of the resolution (A/C.5/54/2).

9. In paragraph 103 of its report, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to develop specific implementation proposals for submission to the Assembly. The intention of the Secretary-General would be to review the implementation of resolution 53/221 and, in the light of that experience, submit his views in detail to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session within the context of his comprehensive report on human resources management reform.

10. The Secretary-General welcomes the opportunity to propose, for the consideration of Member States, a slight modification in the working methods of the Fifth Committee, with a view to ensuring that the fullest information is available to Member States prior to their taking decisions with respect to human resources management. Although Secretariat officials are often asked to provide information and views during the formal and informal discussions of the Fifth Committee, there is often little or no time to comment on the final text of draft resolutions prior to their adoption. It may be helpful to provide the draft text of any resolution on human resources management to the Secretariat for its comments prior to the resolution's adoption. Such a procedure would allow the Secretariat to identify any problems with respect to implementation and allow the Committee to make amendments, if it so wished. The Secretariat would appreciate the views of the General Assembly on this proposal.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/54/7).